

WASHINGTON

FORMER CIA DIRECTOR SAYS CONGRESS NEED NOT APPROVE COVERT ACTION  
BY LARRY MARGASAK

Former CIA director Stansfield Turner warned a rare open session of the House Intelligence Committee Wednesday that secret paramilitary operations would be scrapped if Congress had to approve them in advance.

Turner, head of the spy agency under President Jimmy Carter, said, "There are covert actions that would be very helpful to this country that would be ruled out if approval were involved."

Turner told the committee: "There is a perception in the intelligence community that the further a secret gets from the intelligence branch, the more likely it is to leak."

His testimony paralleled that of ex-CIA Director William E. Colby on Tuesday. Colby predicted that if advance congressional approval were required, "no clandestine activity of that sort will ever take place."

Legislation now before the panel would give Congress the right to approve virtually all covert paramilitary operations carried out or financed by the United States.

Rep. Wyche Fowler Jr., D-Ga., the chief sponsor and a committee member, said covert operations which involve a military force — those covered by the legislation — are few in number and separate from more common intelligence gathering activities.

One congressional source, who asked not to be named, said there are less than a dozen paramilitary operations a year.

Turner said Congress should monitor the effectiveness of the nation's intelligence agencies and make sure the operations remain within proper boundaries.

"If the bill passed, you're going to get mired down and lose this broader perspective," Turner said.

When the former CIA director noted that the House and Senate intelligence committees receive advance notification of covert operations, Fowler commented, "We know it, but we are impotent to stop it in its tracks."

In contrast to Turner's view, two others witnesses supported the congressional controls — Birch Bayh, a former Democratic senator of Indiana and former chairman of the Senate Intelligence Committee; and Morton H. Halperin, director of the Center for National Security Studies.

Halperin said he strongly supported the legislation, but proposed that exceptions be made in situations that arise suddenly, such as the attempted rescue of U.S. hostages in Iran.

"I don't think this bill ties the president down," he testified.

Bayh said of the proposed bill, "I have no problem with that at all." He added that while presidents and CIA directors are "almost obsessed" with the view that "Congress can't be trusted, the real place you have leaks is in the executive branch."